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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the results of a survey of the constituency of the New York Urban League regarding concerns affecting their day-to-day lives in 1978. Questionnaires from 998 individuals were used in compiling the survey results. Results indicate the following: (1) seventy-five percent of respondents felt that the public schools were not preparing blacks for jobs; (2) many respondents expressed concern over the treatment people receive at welfare offices; (3) respondents said that high truancy rates, crime, the small number of black teachers and principals, and poor teaching are serious problems in the schools; (4) housing concerns include landlord abandonment of buildings, high rents, poor services, and infestations by rats and roaches; (5) respondents complained of long waits in health clinics, poor medical service and treatment, and long travel distances to hospitals; (6) crime related concerns included lack of recreational facilities and poor relations with the police; and (7) many respondents identified lack of political power and lack of positive black leadership as the greatest problems affecting black people in their neighborhoods. The report includes recommendations for alleviating these problems. (BE)

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STATUS OF BLACK NEW YORK '79

NEW YORK URBAN LEAGUE

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STATUS OF BLACK NEW YORK 1979

During 1978 New York City went through a series of changes--economically, socially and politically--that severely distressed the lives of black and other minority citizens.

The New York Urban League since 1919 has dedicated itself to developing and implementing programs that promote minority group advancement and equal opportunity in health services, housing, youth guidance, education and employment. We wrote this report, "Status of Black New York 1979," to further the cause for which the New York Urban League has labored over the past 60 years.

Last year at this time the Urban League described the seriously deteriorated condition of large numbers of New York's black and minority citizens. Nineteen seventy-eight brought further deterioration particularly in police-community relations, public education, youth employment, and human service delivery. Most discouraging was a break in communication with the Mayor and the new City Administration.

Forecasts of continuing inflation and recession, budget cuts locally, and tightened Federal spending for programs which directly affect black and poor people makes us believe 1979 will be more severe. The early warning signs are that continued frustration and alienation will inevitably accompany the planned cuts in human services.

In releasing this report, we call attention to the City's need to treat all of its citizens equitably. And in so doing, we fulfill a promise to our constituents and an Urban League responsibility to the City of New York.

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Constituent Survey*

In December 1978, the New York Urban League gave out questionnaires to members of its constituency. It intended to get a systematic reading of concerns which affect its constituents from day-to-day. The questionnaires were distributed through the Urban League's offices in the five boroughs and through churches and community-based agencies.

Of 5,000 questionnaires distributed, 998 usable ones were returned. Sixty-four percent of the respondents were male and 36 percent were female. Nearly one-half, 46 percent, were between the ages of 15 and 25; 35 percent were between the ages of 25 and 40. The balance, 19 percent, was over 40 or under 15 years old. Two-thirds of the constituents were black; one-quarter white; the remainder were black-Hispanics and white-Hispanics.

Forty-one percent of the constituents who filled out questionnaires live in households with 3-5 persons; the balance lived in 1 or 2 person or 6-12 person households. Sixty-two percent live in apartment houses or public housing. Fifty-eight percent earn less than $8,000 annually and 12 percent earn between $8,000 and $10,000.

Nearly one-half, 45 percent, had completed high school. Seventy-two percent reported they were employed, 28 percent were not working. Of those employed, 45 percent were self-employed and 39 percent were employed full-time.

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*A comprehensive research report is scheduled to be released in the spring.

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Jobs

Job losses in New York City have averaged 85,000 annually since 1969. This trend stopped in the fall 1977. The unemployment rate in New York City, in 1978, however, continued to be higher than in the rest of the nation. The City's rate for the year was 9 percent with unemployment among black adults at least double that of whites. Black youth unemployment climbed to 65 percent and even 90 percent in some communities.

Many new jobs in New York City during 1978 came with the influx of foreign business. Most of these employers required skilled secretarial and clerical workers.

Researchers find that many employers in New York City, and throughout the nation, are having trouble finding clerical workers, bank tellers, nurses, paralegals and secretaries. Employers point out that the lack of skill among women and teenagers is a liability in an increasingly technological economy. This problem is particularly acute in the black community where most unemployed teenagers and adults do not qualify for the good jobs available.

A recent report published by the National Urban League revealed that 37 percent of the black labor force concentrates in clerical and service occupations and approximately 60 percent of those workers are women. In addition, the study pointed out that talented young blacks are leaving the City to seek better opportunities. The study further noted that second and third generation blacks who do not have skills or education are the least likely to leave the City.

Three out of four people who responded to the New York Urban League

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poll, when asked, "What are the reasons for black unemployment in New York City?" answered that the public schools were not preparing blacks for jobs.

Welfare

Inflation has taken its toll. In 1978, working poor people and welfare recipients found they could barely survive on their earnings or grants. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents stated they felt the biggest welfare problem was "welfare doesn't give enough money to live on." Despite inflation, welfare grants have not been increased since 1974. The Mayor's recent request for the State to increase New York City's welfare grants might bring relief.

Welfare offices are used by poor people who have no work, some who work, old people, blind people, disabled people and people who need food stamps, medicaid and home attendant services. A great concern indicated by the Urban League constituents is the treatment people receive at welfare offices. Of over 2,000 responses to a check-list question--"What are the biggest welfare problems for blacks?"--one-third of the responses were "disrespect" and "poor service."

Education

In education, little change is visible. Truancy continues to mount in the schools. By the end of 1978, truancy had reached a city-wide average of over 30 percent, one of the highest in the country. City officials estimated that of the City's 1,000,000 school children, about 200,000 are absent each day. In March 1978, a State Democratic Task Force on Truancy report put the City's truancy rate at over 225,000 youngsters each day.

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Disturbing is the fact that the highest truancy rates are found in public high schools that serve predominantly blacks and other minorities. Also, elementary and intermediate schools in these communities are not meeting the Board of Education attendance standard of 15 percent or less absenteeism.

"There are no attendance officers," said one respondent to the poll, "to follow up children who don't attend school."

And he is right.

In a report on truancy issued by the Schools Chancellor in October of last year, it was revealed that there are only 11 attendance supervisors assigned to the 32 districts which oversee elementary and junior high school education. Some districts, for example District 9 in the South Bronx, do not have an attendance supervisor.

Violence in the schools continues unabated. Police precincts in black and minority communities are swamped with calls from public school officials demanding investigations of incidents ranging from knifings to sexual assaults and indecent exposure in the schools. Answering a check-list question "What are the biggest problems for black children in the public schools?" nearly one-half of the Urban League constituents checked "crime."

The Board of Education has beefed up security and assigned problem students to Socially, Maladjusted and Emotionally Disturbed (SMED) schools. The problem with these assignments is that youngsters cannot return to regular schools without being "evaluated" by teachers and clinicians in the SMED schools. Approximately 40,000 children are assigned to SMED schools of whom 92 percent are black.

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More than one-third, 38 percent, of the City's one million school children are black, 30 percent white, 24 percent Puerto Rican and 8 percent other minority. Eleven percent of the City's 50,000 teachers are black and 5 percent Hispanic. Thirty-six percent of Urban League constituents polled indicated there are not enough black teachers and principals in the City's schools. Sixty-eight percent indicated that the teaching is poor.

The Board of Education has yet to come up with an acceptable plan for integrating the teaching staffs of the City's schools. And on April 7, 1978, Judge Jack B. Weinstein invalidated an integration agreement signed by the City's Board of Education and the Federal Office for Civil Rights.

Housing

In housing, redlining continues. A Harvard-MIT study of lending practices in New York State, which was released December of last year, concluded that "black applicants have twice as great a chance of being turned down for a mortgage as do white applicants with similar socio-economic, property and neighborhood characteristics."

In apartments, abandonment by landlords threatens to leave the City in possession of an estimated 80,000 rental apartments by late spring. The majority of the apartments, according to the Mayor, "are in dreadful condition and could require as much as $130 million in repairs to provide heat and hot water."

When asked what were the greatest housing problems facing blacks in New York, 43 percent of the respondents cited landlords' abandonment of buildings, 42 percent stated rents were too high, 38 percent indicated

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services provided by landlords were poor, 35 percent and 29 percent, respectively, complained of roaches and rats.

Health

A problem causing great anxiety among blacks and other minorities is health care. Health-related services have been cut sharply during the City's continuing fiscal crisis. Poor people discovered over the past year that the minimal services they had been receiving are gone. The poll showed 28 percent of the Urban League constituents use the services of a hospital when ill, 19 percent use a clinic.

When asked "what are the biggest health care problems for black persons in your community?" 75 percent cited long waits in clinics, 55 percent cited poor service in the emergency room, 53 percent reported they received poor medical treatment, and 50 percent indicated that hospitals were too far away.

The reduction in public health services increases the probability that poor people in New York City will fall victim to high blood pressure, anemia, obesity, decaying teeth, malnutrition, pneumonia, diabetes, alcoholism, or an increased infant mortality rate.

Crime

Crime continues to concern black New York. Even though crimes in New York City dropped from 658,000 in 1976 to 610,000 in 1977, respondents to our poll indicated that crime in black and other minority communities is still a problem. Of 4,802 responses to a check-list question, "What are the greatest problems affecting blacks in your neighborhood?," "lack of recreational facilities for youth," and "kids hanging out on the streets" ranked

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#1 and #2--15 percent and 11 percent, respectively. Ranked #3 was crime with 9 percent of the responses.

Police community relations continues to be a problem. Early in 1978, three precincts, 26th and 28th in Harlem and 41st in the South Bronx, were considered "problem" precincts because of civilian complaints against police officers. All three precincts according to the Civilian Complaint Review Board have a history of not accepting and of ignoring or discouraging civilian complaints against police officers. Also all three "flunked" a department integrity-control test conducted in the fall of 1977.

In the summer of 1978, Arthur Miller a community activist in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn became the fifth black man to die, in the past five years, under questionable circumstances at the hands of New York City policemen. No black policemen were involved in the Miller incident. Mr. Miller, before he died, carried a licensed pistol in his waistband.

Black policemen interviewed by a *New York Times* reporter shortly after Mr. Miller's death indicated it is "generally accepted that a white man in civilian clothes holding a gun in a black community would be assumed to be a policeman rather than a criminal. The opposite, they insisted, was the case of a black man in civilian clothes." This situation frightens and enrages citizens of black and minority communities in New York.

Politics

Some of the fear and rage can be attributed to a lack of political power and a feeling of helplessness that many blacks and other minorities experienced during 1978. Of those constituents responding to our poll, 42 percent identified lack of political power and 38 percent identified lack of

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positive black leadership as the greatest problems affecting black people in their neighborhoods.

There are no black representatives on the body which directs the City's finances and service delivery--the Board of Estimate. The number of government workers on the City payroll has been declining since 1970. A report by the New York City Commission on Human Rights showed that, between July 1, 1974, and November 7, 1975, 28 percent of the mayoral agency work force lost jobs. Hispanics lost half of their jobs, blacks more than a third, Asians 30 percent and whites, 22 percent. A "last hired, first fired" policy was employed. The Human Rights report pointed out that the City does not have a workable affirmative action program. This fact looms as a major source of tension in 1979.

Given current conditions in New York City, it is imperative that the same concern be demonstrated for black and other minority citizens that is given to budget balancing. The New York Urban League recommends the following:

Employment

- New York City build links between its CETA-funded employment and training programs and the outside world.

- A massive job creation program be launched linking schools, Department of Employment and the private sector.

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Education

- The Board of Education focus our school system on children who have the greatest need.

  If these children are helped to learn, everybody will benefit.

- The City make a strong commitment to the idea that *ALL* children can learn and that *ALL* children have a right to an education.

  The Mayor must support his new Chancellor who has demonstrated concern for our children and who has attempted to redirect funds to services for children.

Welfare

- All welfare budgets be adjusted to reflect the increasing price of food, clothing and other necessities.

  It is an outrage that there has been no increase in the welfare budget since 1974. The Urban League supports the Mayor's position of asking the State to assume full fiscal responsibility for increases in welfare grant levels.

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Housing

- The City provide inhabitants of City-owned properties with the opportunity to repair, manage and eventually own the buildings where they live.

- Abandoned buildings not be returned to landlords who show a lack of concern for the tenants who live in the deteriorating housing they provide.

The City has recently helped landlords who have difficulty collecting rent. It has supported the two-party check proposal in which the landlord and tenant must cosign before the check can be cashed.

The New York Urban League and other social organizations strongly oppose this two-party check proposal.

We call on the City to show the same concern for poor people that it shows for landlords.

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Health

- Before it dismantles the existing health service system, the City present the public with a plan documenting how the poor and the sick will receive decent medical care.

We call for public hearings that listen to persons whose lives will be most affected by the cuts in health services.

Race Relations

- The Mayor and his administration include more black and minority persons who are sensitive to community problems and who have demonstrated an ability to help solve problems at the highest decision-making levels.

- The Mayor bring black and minority persons into high positions in all facets of City government, especially in the Department of Employment, the Department of Social Services and the City Planning Commission.

Name calling and strident rhetoric, often used by the Mayor himself, should be stopped.

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With a spirit of goodwill and harmony, the New York Urban League again advocates that the severe plight of New York City's blacks and minorities be recognized as a top priority condition.

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